



[Act 517](#) of the 2022 Louisiana Legislative Session **prohibits** the use of the three-cueing system, or the MSV technique, in curriculum and instructional materials. This approach has been **proven ineffective** by empirical research in teaching students to read. This guidance document provides an explanation of what the three-cueing system is, what to look for when identifying these strategies in curricular materials, why it is **not** best for students learning to read, and what instructional strategies are proven effective for teaching students to read and comprehend.

What is the “Three-Cueing System?”

The three cueing system is an approach to *foundational skills instruction* that involves the use of three different types of instructional cues: semantic (gaining meaning from context and sentence-level cues), syntactic or grammatical features, and grapho-phonetic (spelling patterns). When students encounter words that they cannot read automatically, they are prompted to question themselves using the following three questions: *Does it look right? Does it sound right? Does it make sense?*



At the earliest stages of learning to read, students are prompted to default to semantic or syntactic cues before attempting to use grapho-phonetic cues. Students are encouraged to use illustrations to “guess” the meaning of words in predictably-written texts.

As part of the three-cueing system, teachers analyze student reading errors using the “MSV” technique and seek to determine if reading errors are related to “meaning, structure, or visual” issues. If students’ errors are meaning-related, the teacher will focus instructional efforts on supporting a student in using semantic cues to read passages. If the issues are related to structure, the teacher will focus on supporting students’ use of syntactic cues, and if the errors are visual, the teacher will prompt students to use grapho-phonetic strategies.

As evidence mounts against the three-cueing system, many programs no longer refer to this instructional approach using this terminology, so identifying three-cueing in curricular resources requires careful observation of the strategies used to guide students as they learn to read.

When Might I See “Three-Cueing?”

The three-cueing approach is most-often found during foundational skills instruction in grades K-2. Some of the common prompts associated with this approach - “Does this make sense?” or “Look at the picture” - can be appropriate in other instructional contexts, such as when a student is encouraged to use illustrations to support deeper comprehension of stories, or when students are monitoring their own reading, but they are not effective strategies or prompts for teaching students to read words on a page. Instead of relying on multiple, varied cues, students should instead be consistently prompted to decode words using learned spelling and syllabication patterns.

As the three-cueing approach typically involves teachers prompting students to use different cues, this type of instruction is often found in small-group or individual settings. It is a hallmark of “Balanced Literacy.”



Common Features of Programs that Use the “Three-Cueing System”

Leveled Readers - Unlike decodable texts, which include only words that contain spelling patterns for which students have been explicitly taught, leveled readers are books that are designed to encourage students to rely upon three-cueing strategies to be able to successfully read them. At the earliest levels, these books contain predictable patterns (*I see a red ball, I see a blue ball, I see a green ball*) and heavy picture support. As students progress through grade levels, the texts become increasingly complex. While there may be descriptions of what characterizes books of different levels, they are rarely tied to learned spelling and syllabication patterns and are instead leveled according to sentence and/or vocabulary complexity. When reading from leveled readers, students may read books that are “on their level” that contain spelling patterns for which they have not been explicitly taught.

Reading Strategies - In many classrooms using the “three-cueing system,” you may see posters encouraging students to use strategies such as “Lips the Fish,” “Eagle Eye,” or “Chunky Monkey.” Some of these strategies encourage students to engage in reading behaviors that are not aligned to best practices in reading instruction. More effective prompts will encourage students to decode words using learned spelling and/or syllabication patterns.

The following table shares some of the clear differences between instruction grounded in science of reading research and balanced literacy instructional approaches.

Foundational Skills Instruction	
Science of Reading	Balanced Literacy
decodable texts	leveled texts
systematic, explicit phonics instruction	phonics instruction provided “as needed;” not systematic
students prompted to “decode” words	students prompted to ask “does it look right, does it sound right, does it make sense?”
	students prompted to look at pictures for support in figuring out the meaning of unknown words (most often in grades K-1)
	guided reading

Access the [Literacy Library](#) for additional guidance and resources that support [best practices in literacy instruction](#). Contact louisianaliteracy@la.gov with any questions.